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Meeting

Wartime Sheep Production

Goals

By

Experiment Station and Extension Animal Husbandmen
Oklahoma A. and M. College

OKLAHOMA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
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WARTIME SHEEP PRODUCTION

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Prepared by

EXPERIMENT STATION AND EXTENSION ANIMAL HUSBANDMEN*

Oklahoma A. and M. College

To produce the maximum amount of lamb and wool to feed and clothe our armed forces, it is extremely essential that sheep be handled in the most efficient manner. This circular summarizes practices which research and practical experience have shown will produce the most lamb and wool with the least labor and feed.

PASTURE IS KEY TO PROFITS

Any Oklahoma farmer who has spare wheat or other small-grain pasture (oats, barley, or rye) in the fall of the year should consider the possibility of running feeder lambs on the area. Feeder lambs make very economical gains while on winter pasture. When abundant small-grain pasture is available, lambs may be put in market condition in from 90 to 110 days. They will gain at about the same rate on a good small-grain pasture as they will in dry lot. All the pounds of lamb and mutton that are produced from a grain field can be regarded as a profitable by-product of wheat or other small-grain farming.

The sheep production program in Oklahoma should be centered around the maximum use of pasture. By planning well in advance, it will be possible to pasture sheep for most of the year.

Winter pasture can be built largely around wheat or other small winter grains. Permanent pastures can usually be depended upon when sheep are removed from wheat pasture, but in most areas they should be supplemented during the hot dry summer months with sudan grass. Cowpeas and other legumes fit in well in late summer and early fall as temporary sheep pastures.

* Material assembled and put into final form by Hilton M. Briggs, Associate Professor of Animal Husbandry (Sheep).

HANDLING THE BREEDING FLOCK

Good Rams Pay.

The greatest improvement that can be made in sheep, from the standpoint of producing lambs and wool, can be made by use of good purebred rams. A ewe influences only one lamb, or at the most a pair of twins, but a ram influences each lamb that he sires, and consequently has 25 or 30 times as much influence in the flock as does any one ewe.

Experiments at the Oklahoma Station have proved that commercial lambs sired by purebred rams are worth approximately two dollars more than lambs sired by scrub rams, when lambs are well cared for and fed. At the very least, lambs sired by good rams are worth $1 more per head in this state where the farm flock ewes are largely of fine wool breeding. A good purebred mutton ram will sire lambs that will go to market and compete with lambs from native ewes in market finish and in the conformation desired in slaughter lambs.

Early Lambs Most Profitable.

Not only should the producer use good rams, but sufficient rams are strict economy. In cooler climates, three rams per hundred ewes are usually sufficient. In this area, where we want early lambs, it is unquestionably good economy to have 4 rams per hundred ewes. Early lambing means that ewes must be bred during hot weather, and all rams are naturally more sluggish in hot weather. Some rains fail to work at all during extremely high temperatures.

Oklahoma is one of the very few areas suited by nature for the production of early spring lambs without the expenditure of extra effort and feed. Because of the fine winter pasture and weather in this area, ewes should be bred, where at all practicable, to lamb between the middle of November and the middle of December. This is about the most ideal lambing weather in Oklahoma. Most native ewes will not breed to lamb at this time, but a very high percentage of range ewes of fine wool breeding and some breeds of mutton ewes (Dorsets in particular) will breed at this season. With early lambs, the big feed requirement for the flock comes during the months when winter wheat pasture is available, and the flock is pared to a minimum during the hot, dry, summer months when pastures as scarce.

Care at Lambing Time Essential.

Sheep cannot be neglected at lambing time if the highest percentage of lambs is to be saved. It is best to have an at-

tendant available all the time during the lambing season. If at all possible, remove the ewe and the new-born lamb from the main flock and put them in a small lambing pen of approximately 4 by 5 feet and leave them for 2 or 3 days. While the ewe is in the lambing pen, feed can be controlled according to the rate of milk flow. Feed can be increased if the ewe is not milking well, or can be decreased if she is producing so much that the lamb is developing indigestion and scours.

Ewes with lambs should be kept separate from ewes yet to lamb so the ones with lambs can be fed more heavily. This necessitates two bands of ewes, but the results justify the extra effort.

Well Fed Ewes Raise Better Lambs.

The breeding flock should always be maintained in at least good breeding condition. It is extremely poor economy to starve the flock. Inadequate feeding invariably leads to fewer and weaker lambs and a small milk flow, as well as to a light wool crop. Thus, too close hoarding of desirable feed cuts off the chance of profit in the sheep business. On the other hand, avoid allowing ewes to become excessively fat.

Most flocks of ewes will require very little grain if a good pasture program is worked out. In many instances, only a small amount of hay will be required. It is far-sighted economy, however, to have hay and grain available when they are needed. Fine wool ewes will usually require about 3 pounds of good legume hay per day. If the quality of the hay is poor or the ewes are thin, they may also need a half-pound of grain late in gestation. Non-legume hays should be supplemented with approximately a quarter of a pound of cottonseed meal or other similar high-protein supplement per head daily. It is an excellent plan to feed one-fourth ounce of finely ground limestone per head daily in the grain mix if non-legume hays are fed.

Salt and mineral mixture for the breeding flock should be the same as recommended for fattening lambs.

Culling Ewes Saves Feed.

It is a good idea to cull the ewe flock closely at the time the lambs are sent to market. All unthrifty, unproductive ewes should be culled. For commercial production, it is extremely doubtful whether ewes more than 6 years of age should be kept.

Discarded ewes should be replaced by sound, young ones. Old, worn-out ewes require more feed and usually produce less lamb and wool per dollar invested than do healthy young ewes.

Docking and Castration Help Top Market.

To get the desired market tops, all lambs need to be docked and ram lambs castrated. Many successful operators prefer to dock the lambs at from 2 to 3 days of age and then castrate from 10 days to 2 weeks of age. Both operations can be done at the same time, but since both are major operations they are severe on the lambs. Days with bright warm sunshine are best for docking and castration. Lambs should be driven and excited as little as possible before the operations. The work should be done in a clean place and the lambs turned to pasture or placed in a well bedded pen. It is a very good precaution to apply a standard test disinfectant according to the manufacturer's recommendations. In fly season pine tar should be applied to the wounds to keep flies repelled. This repellant may be needed at 2 to 3 day intervals in weather well suited to fly development.

Undocked lambs present a very undesirable appearance on the market, and do not attract buyers. Ram lambs are docked $1 a hundred during most of the year, and are likely to be lighter in weight and less finished than ewe and wether lambs handled under similar conditions.

Creep Feeding Best for Early Lambs.

Creep feeding is one of the very best ways to get lambs to a desirable finish if they are to be marketed before June 15. If they are going to be carried through the summer months not much benefit will be secured from creep feeding before weaning.

A creep to feed lambs need not be elaborate. All that is needed is a small pen to exclude the ewes and permit the lambs to enter. Feed in the creep should be kept clean and fresh and changed at least once daily. Very satisfactory results have been secured with a single grain such as corn or one of the grain sorghums. Protein supplements usually are not required for nursing lambs, because ewes' milk is very high in protein.

Only well finished lambs should be taken to the market. One of the hardest animals to dispose of at a central market is an unfinished lamb. At present there is no discrimination against lambs weighing 100 pounds or upwards; and the producer can take advantage of this fact by carrying lambs to heavier than normal weights. It is easier and cheaper to carry 6 to 7 lambs to 10 or 15 pounds heavier weights than it is to produce the same amount of lamb by keeping an extra ewe in the flock.

Salt, mineral, and fresh water should be provided at all times to both lambs and breeding flocks. Flake salt usually proves most satisfactory for sheep; and a simple mineral mixture of equal parts of steamed bone meal, finely ground limestone, and salt gives very satisfactory results and has the advantage of being inexpensive. Many operators, if they do not want to provide both salt and a mineral mixture, step up amount of salt in the mineral mixture to two parts of salt to one each of the other ingredients, and allow it to be the only supply of salt.

June 15 Is Market Deadline.

Lambs in this area should be marketed by June 1 if at all possible, or by the middle of June at the latest. Lambs must be handled with extreme care in Oklahoma during July, August, and the first half of September if they are going to maintain their weights. Lambs marketed before the first of June go on the market carrying the maximum amount of baby weight and sell to a very good advantage.

Anyone producing sheep in Oklahoma should keep in mind the four basic reasons why lambs marketed before June 1 are most profitable:

1. Such lambs are raised on best feed supply.
2. They are raised during best producing weather.
3. They are raised practically free of parasites.
4. They usually sell on highest seasonal market.

Shearing Helps Lambs Through Summer.

Lambs that are to be carried through the hot summer months should be shorn late in June or early in July. Shorn lambs go through the summer in much better shape than do full wool lambs. They will put on more weight with less feed, be fatter when marketed in the fall, and, in addition, will produce shearling pelts much needed by the armed forces.

MISCELLANEOUS

Control of Parasites.

The ewe flock and any lambs carried through the summer months should be drenched systematically for the control of internal parasites. Unquestionably, it is a good idea to drench the flock in the early spring and late fall with phenothiazine. This drug is effective against nearly all internal parasites (except tape worms) that bother sheep in this area. This drug, although expensive, does a very thorough job and is the only known medicinal treatment highly effective against nodular worms. By treating sheep in the early spring and late fall, nodular worms are kept under control. Lambs marketed from flocks treated with phenothiazine can contribute in a greater measure to the war effort because their intestines can be used for surgical sutures.

Once each month during the grazing season, sheep should be treated with a copper sulphate solution or a copper sulphate and nicotine sulphate (Black Leaf 40 or steeped tobacco) drench. Such treatment keeps stomach worms and tape worms under control with very little cost. Pregnant ewes can be drenched safely except for the danger of injury from crowding or rough treatment. Most operators will find it advisable not to drench ewes during the last month or six weeks of pregnancy.

One should wait at least one month after sheep have been shorn, before they are dipped for external parasites. In this area dipping may be postponed until fall. Any kind of dips recommended for the purpose by the manufacturer may be used, but commonly the sulphur or arsenic-containing dips (some commercial dips contain both) will prove more satisfactory because they need to be used only once. The manufacturer's directions should be followed carefully in the use of the dip.

Shearing.

All shearing should be done in a clean place. Wool should be shorn from the sheep as carefully as possible, and every effort should be made to avoid second cuts in the fleece (cutting the fiber more than once). A skillful operator is worth considerably more in shearing a flock of sheep than is an inexperienced or careless hand.

Pregnant ewes should be shorn only with great care. There is little danger if they are handled gently, but rough treatment may result in abortion.

Wool should be tied with paper twine and stored in a dry place.

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